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tapol
British Campaign for the Defence of Political Prisoners and Human Rights in Indonesia

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PRESS RELEASE

MRS THATCHER'S SILENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE IN INDONESIA IS INEXCUSABLE, SAYS TAPOL

Monday, 15 April, 1985

TAPOL strongly protests at Mrs Thatcher's failure during her visit to Indonesia last week to raise a single human rights issue with General Suharto, Indonesia's President. The Indonesian military regime is currently engaged in a war of aggression against the people of East Timor and has flagrantly violated human rights in the area. In West Papua, now the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, military operations waged since early last year have driven 12,000 West Papuans to seek refuge across the border in Papua New Guinea.

In Indonesia itself, 28 seriously wounded survivors of a massacre last September when troops shot dead an estimated 63 demonstrators, were on trial in Jakarta, even as the British Prime Minister was holding talks with General Suharto. On the very day of her press conference in the Indonesian capital, verdicts of one to three years' imprisonment were passed on all the defendants who were found guilty largely on the basis of testimony from the very soldiers who shot them down. The defendants were on trial for participating in a demonstration calling for the release of four mosque officials. British Embassy officials in Jakarta certainly know that the defence lawyers called for a public inquiry into the massacre at the commencement of the trial, and told the court that the defendants should by rights be suing the government for damages, not standing trial.

Mrs Thatcher's statement that East Timor is a matter for settlement between Indonesia (in illegal occupation of East Timor) and Portugal (the country's former colonial ruler) ignores the right of the East Timorese people to representation in talks now under way under UN auspices. The British Government is on record as saying last January that "the people of East Timor deserve the opportunity to determine their own future in accordance with their own political aspirations". But this statement of principle is meaningless unless Britain supports Timorese representation in the settlement of a conflict that has left nearly a third of the population of East Timor dead.

Why did Mrs Thatcher accept and publicly reiterate General Suharto's assertion that the International Red Cross (ICRC)"not only has access to East

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Timor but is welcome there" when she knows very well that the ICRC has been excluded from continuing relief operations throughout mainland East Timor since July 1983, the month before Indonesian Armed Forces launched a new offensive in the country. In January this year, ICRC President, Mr Alexandre Hay referred to East Timor as one of the few areas of conflicts in the world where the ICRC is excluded from implementing a relief programme. Since July 1983, the ICRC has been restricted to infrequent prison visits and a food programme limited to assisting more than a thousand untried detainees who have been held since 1981 on the island of Atauro.

In West Papua, resistance to Indonesian rule has intensified since early last year. In April, Arnold Ap, the Papuan anthropologist and folk musician, under detention since November 1983, was shot dead by Indonesian paracommandos during a faked 'escape' attempt. The Indonesian authorities have ignored calls for an independent inquiry into Mr Ap's killing. The primary cause for Papuan unrest is Jakarta's plans to resettle nearly three quarters of a million Javanese in West Papua by 1989. This programme is driving Papuan villagers from their ancestral lands and turning them into a minority in their own country.

Mrs Thatcher's visit to Indonesia was the culmination of a sales drive to promote arms exports. Over the past two years, several ministers and senior officers of the British Armed Forces have visited Jakarta. Britain's biggest arms deal in 1984 was with Indonesia, a £100 million contract for Rapier missiles from British Aerospace. Earlier in the year, Vosper-Thorneycroft clinched a deal to supply three refitted naval frigates to the Indonesian Navy.

It is inexcusable for the British Prime Minister to turn a blind eye to the numerous human rights violations being perpetrated by Indonesia's military rulers, while boosting the sale of military hardware to Indonesia's Armed Forces which are responsible for so much bloodshed.

For more information, please contact 874-3262.